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A bipartisan group of House members is pressuring the U.S. Export-Import Bank to stop financing U.S. companies that indirectly abet trade with Iran.

The members say the bank's loan guarantees are, in some cases, undermining pressure on Teheran to stop developing nuclear weapons and supporting terrorism.

The Export-Import Bank helps U.S. firms with financing of exports. It backed in 2007 and 2008 some \$900 million in loan guarantees to U.S. companies that are helping an Indian firm named Reliance Industries Limited to build facilities, including at least one used to export gasoline to Iran, according to the bank. The U.S. firms, mostly based in the Houston area, include Bechtel Corporation, J. Ray McDermott Inc., and Canyon Offshore Inc.

Iran relies on imports for some 40 percent of its refined petroleum, and the members say that Reliance has at times supplied as much as 30 percent of those imports.

"The U.S. government should not assist firms that provide Iran with refined petroleum without carefully examining the potential impacts on U.S.-Iran policy," the members wrote in a Dec. 17 letter to the bank's president, James Lambright. "Any such examination, if conducted at all, was perfunctory at best."

The letter was signed by eight House members who serve either on the Foreign Affairs Committee or the Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations. Included were six Democrats: Howard L. Berman of California, Steven R. Rothman of New Jersey, Steve Israel of New York, Gary L. Ackerman and Brad Sherman of California, and Ron Klein of Florida. They were joined by two Republicans: Mark Steven <Kirk of Illinois and Ed Royce of California.

They said they were "deeply concerned about the inadequate attention paid to other vital

national interests in the approval of these loan guarantees.”

The members urged the bank to more closely scrutinize the affect of its loan guarantees on U.S. policy objectives. They asked the bank to ensure that Reliance commits to ending its gasoline shipments to Iran before any undisbursed guarantees are released.

“We could greatly increase our leverage against Tehran in the dispute over its nuclear program by encouraging those supplying them with gasoline to halt their trade with Iran,” said Sherman in a statement.